

FOIA

Getting government records

Sunlight's unofficial position

- Government records should be open
- We should not need FOIA
- Default should be release
- We pay for this stuff, right?



[illegible]

- 1999

requesting the examination

Magic words

- Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act, 5 USC § 552, I am writing to request the following records:


Variation

- Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act, 5 USC § 552, I am writing to request the following records in electronic format:

One last big block of text

- Please be advised that 5 USC § 552 (a) (3)(b) requires agencies to "provide the record in any form or format requested by the person if the record is readily reproducible by the agency in that form or format," and that, "Each agency shall make reasonable efforts to maintain its records in forms or formats that are reproducible for purposes of this section."

Pennsylvania has this form:


STANDARD RIGHT-TO-KNOW REQUEST FORM

DATE REQUESTED: _____

REQUEST SUBMITTED BY: ☐ E-MAIL ☐ U.S. MAIL ☐ FAX ☐ IN-PERSON

REQUEST SUBMITTED TO (Agency name & address): _____

NAME OF REQUESTER: _____

STREET ADDRESS: _____

CITY/STATE/COUNTY/ZIP (Required): _____

TELEPHONE (Optional): _____ EMAIL (Optional): _____

RECORDS REQUESTED: "Provide as much specific detail as possible so the agency can identify the information. Please use additional sheets if necessary." _____

DO YOU WANT COPIES? YES or NO _____

DO YOU WANT TO INSPECT THE RECORDS? YES or NO _____

DO YOU WANT CERTIFIED COPIES OF RECORDS? YES or NO _____

** PLEASE NOTE: RETAIN A COPY OF THIS REQUEST FOR YOUR FILES **
** IT IS A REQUIRED DOCUMENT IF YOU WOULD NEED TO FILE AN APPEAL **

FOR AGENCY USE ONLY

RIGHT TO KNOW OFFICER: _____

DATE RECEIVED BY THE AGENCY: _____

AGENCY FIVE (5) BUSINESS DAY RESPONSE DUE: _____

**Public bodies may file anonymous verbal or written requests. If the requestor wishes to pursue the relief and remedies provided for in this Act, the request must be in writing. (Section 702) Written requests need not include an explanation why information is sought or the intended use of the information unless otherwise required by law. (Section 703.)

- You can send it several ways
- Request records or in-person review
- Send it to an agency's open records officer

New Jersey has this one

State of New Jersey
Government Records Request Form

Important Notice

The [GRC site](#) contains important information related to your rights to request government records. Please read it carefully. [Instructions](#) to complete the form are available.
At this time, not all State agencies are able to accept online requests. If the agency is not listed here, visit the [agency web sites](#) for instructions and forms.

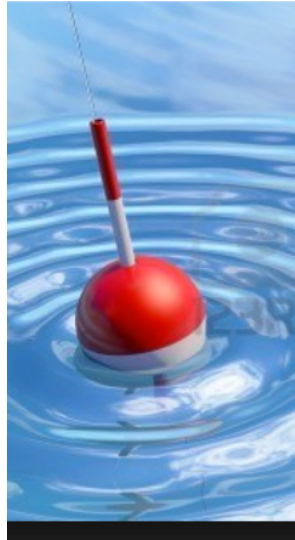
Requestor Information				Payment Information	
First Name	MI	Last Name		Maximum Authorized Cost	
<input type="text"/>				\$	<input type="text"/>
Company				Select Payment Method	
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Mailing Address				<input type="radio"/> Check	
<input type="text"/>				<input type="radio"/> Money Order	
City	State	ZIP		Fees: Letter Size @ \$0.05/page	
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>		Legal Size @ \$0.07/page	
Email	<input type="text"/>				
Business Telephone:	Area Code	Number	Extension	Electronic shall be provided free of charge, but agency may charge for cost of media, programming, clerical, supervisory assistance and/or substantial use of information technology.	
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	Delivery: Delivery / postage fees additional depending upon delivery type.	
Preferred Delivery: <input type="radio"/> E-Mail <input type="radio"/> Pick Up <input type="radio"/> US Mail <input type="radio"/> On Site				Additional may be charged if Charges: extraordinary effort required, depending upon request.	
Select One: Under penalty of N.J.S.A. 2C:28-3, I certify that I <input type="radio"/> Have Not <input type="radio"/> Have been convicted of any indictable offense under the laws of New Jersey, or any other state, or in United States.					
Shaded Fields Are Required!					

Record Request Information: To expedite the request, be as specific as possible in describing the records being requested. Also, please include the type of access requested (copying, inspection, or examination), and if data, the medium requested.

- Found agency by agency
- Find more information at NJ.gov/OPRA

<http://nj.gov/opra/>

Some basics



- Have to ask for things that exist
- Send it to the right agency
- More specificity= quicker attention
- Sometimes, you got to fish

The Catch 22



- How can you know what to ask for if you don't know what exists?

A major limitation of FOIA



- You have to know what you're asking for exists
- Agencies won't make a special report
- Data is a little different, but...
 - You have to know data's structure
 - Hard when you haven't seen it

Examples

- Wrong
 - Please provide photographic evidence of Bigfoot's existence.
- Right
 - Please provide all documents, including but not limited to reports, letters and emails, that mention Bigfoot or Sasquatch or the Wild Man of the Woods.

Some tips

Record Types	Retention Period
Accounts payable ledger	7 years
Accounts receivable ledger	7 years
Audit reports of accountants	Permanently
Bank statements	7 years
Capital stock and bond records	Permanently
Charts of accounts	Permanently
Contracts and leases	Permanently
Correspondence (legal)	Permanently
Deeds, mortgages, bill of sale	Permanently
Employee payroll records	Permanently
Employment applications	3 years
Inventory records (products)	7 years
Insurance records	Permanently
Invoices to customers	5 years
Invoices from vendors	5 years
Patents	Permanently
Payroll records and tax returns	7 years
Purchase orders	5 years
Safety records	6 years
Time cards and daily reports	7 years
Training manuals	Permanently
Union agreements	Permanently

- Ask for records retention rules
- What forms does an agency collect?
- Don't ignore the human element
- Look for descriptions of databases

Brief interlude

Area of focus: Data Asset Catalog

The purpose of the Data Asset Catalog is to store information about the Data Assets used to accomplish the mission of homeland security. Each DHS Component is responsible for maintaining an accurate, up to date description of its data assets within the Data Asset Catalog under DHS policy, and as documented in the Enterprise Data Management Concept of Operations. Progress on this initiative has been captured for the past three years on the Enterprise Data Management Scorecard, which is presented quarterly to the DHS CIO Council.

The DHS Data Asset Catalog currently includes approximately 900 data assets of an overall total of 1,200 data assets.

The majority of the remaining 300 data assets will be included in the catalog in Fiscal Year 2011 through continued support of the Data Management Working Group.

Clarification of terms:

A **Data Asset** is a distinct organized collection of structured, semi-structured or unstructured values. Examples include a database, web site, document repository, extended mark-up language (XML) file, a geospatial image file or a data service.

A **data asset** may produce or store one or more **datasets**. For example, the National Emergency Management Information System (NEMIS) - Emergency Support Module is a FEMA data asset. The FEMA Disaster Declarations Summary and the FEMA Hazard Mitigation Program Summary are two datasets extracted from NEMIS Emergency Support Module.

- Open gov—Yay!
- DHS makes Data Asset Catalog
- Lists 900 of 1200 data sets
- Data, document warehouses, etc.
- And the best thing is...

It's secret



- We FOIAed it anyway
- Haven't been turned down
- Haven't been granted it

I mentioned data is different

CCS 4.0 Browse Hits - Page 21

[illegible]

- You can request subsets
- You can specify a format
- You don't always get what you want

We used ocrad

OSD CONTROL NUMBER: OSD 03257-07 DOCUMENTTYPE:
INCOMING DOC: 2128/2007 DOR: 3/12/2007

FROM: uss LEVIN, c TO: SECDEF

SUBJECT: REauEst FOR NUMBER OF IRAai INDIVIDUALS
WHO HAVE HELPED THE u.s. SUSTAIN AND MANAGE ITS
PRESENCE IN IRAa

AGENCY: JCS TASK: PRS SUSPENSE: 3/13/2007 ACD:

FILE NUMBER: IRAa

OSD CONTROL NUMBER: OSD 03288-07 DOCUMENT TYPE:
INCOMING DOC: 212812007 DOR: 3/2/2007

FROM: uss VOINOVICH, G TO: SECDEF

___'.BJEIT.CLAIM AGAINSTTHE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT
FOR COSTS INCURRED AS A RESULT OF A TERMINATION
OF CONTRACT _

AGENCY: SA - TASK: RD SUSPENSE: 3/13/2007 ACD:
3/13/2007 _

FILE NUMBER: 160

OSD CONTROL NUMBER: OSD 03443-07 DOCUMENT TYPE:
INCOMING DOC: 212812007 DOR: 3/6/2007

FROM: uss CANTWELL, M TO: LA

SUBJECT: REauEst YOUR SUPPORT IN EXPEDITING MY
INVESTIGATION _

AGENCY:SA TASK:RD SUSPENSE: ACD:

FILE NUMBER: T-

- Clear as mud
- “REauEst FOR
NUMBER OF
IRAai
INDIVIDUALS...”
- REauEst YOUR
SUPPORT IN
EXPEDITING...”

And TextWrangler

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File Path = ~/Desktop/OSD-correspondence-logs
OSD-correspondence-logs
+ + + + + OSD-corres...
62
63 OSD CONTROL NUMBER: OSD 03848-07 DOCUMENT TYPE: INCOMING DOC: 212712007 DOR: 311312007
64 FROM: USS MURKOWSKI, L TO: LA
65 SUBJECT: INCREASE NUMBER OF AMYOTROPHIC LATERAL SCLEROSIS ALS OR GERRIG'S DISEASE OCCURRING IN MEN AND WOMEN WHO HAVE SERVED
66 AGENCY:UPR TASK:RD SUSPENSE: ACD:
67 FILE NUMBER: T-
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70 OSD CONTROL NUMBER: OSD 03843-07 DOCUMENT TYPE: INCOMING DOC: 212712007 DOR: 3113/2007
71 FROM: USS MURKOWSKI, L TO: LA
72 SUBJECT: REGARDING TREASURY BENEFITS AND UPDATING LAWS AND REGULATIONS TO INCLUDE LICENSED NEGATIVES
73 AGENCY:UPR TASK:RD SUSPENSE: ACD:
74 FILE NUMBER: T-
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77 OSD CONTROL NUMBER: OSD 03557-07 DOCUMENT TYPE: INCOMING DOC: 212712007 DOR: 31712007
78 FROM: USS MURKOWSKI, L TO: LA
79 SUBJECT: ASSISTANCE WITH INTERPRETING THE NEW NGPS PAY SYSTEM AS IT RELATES TO FEDERAL FIREFIGHTERS
80 AGENCY:UPR TASK:RD SUSPENSE: ACD:
81 FILE NUMBER: T-
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84 OSD CONTROL NUMBER: OSD 03561-07 DOCUMENT TYPE: INCOMING DOC: 212712007 DOR: 31712007
85 FROM: USS MURKOWSKI, L TO: SECDEF
86 SUBJECT: REQUEST STATUS ON SECURITY CLEARANCE
87 AGENCY: uss TASK: RD SUSPENSE: 311912007 ACD: 312112007
88 FILE NUMBER: T-
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104 OSD CONTROL NUMBER: OSD 03596-07 DOCUMENT NPE: INCOMING DOC: 212712007 DOR: 31812007
105 FROM: USS THOMAS, C TO: LA
106 SUBJECT: OFFICIAL DRAWING RETIREMENT PAY
107 AGENCY: usc TASK:RD SUSPENSE: ACD:312112007
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Converted to Excel

	D	E	F	G	H	I
	DOR (Date of	From ORI	Sunlight From	Sunlight TO	TO Org	SUNLIGHT SUBJECT
1	1/8/07	Senate	Akaka, Daniel	Secretary of Defense	DOD	CONGRESSIONAL HEARING REQUEST - VA/DOD COOPERATION
2	2/7/07	Senate	Akaka, Daniel	Assistant Secretary for Leg	DOD	ERROR IN LEAVE AND EARNING STATEMENT FOR PAY
3	1/29/07	Senate	Akaka, Daniel	Secretary of Defense	DOD	JOINT DOD VA INPATIENT ELECTRONIC RECORD SYSTEM
4	3/14/07	Senate	Akaka, Daniel	Assistant Secretary for Leg	DOD	REQUEST FOR DISABILITY FOR HEARING DUE TO EXCESSIVE G
5	1/19/07	Senate	Akaka, Daniel	Assistant Secretary for Leg	DOD	REQUEST STATUS OF SECURITY CLEARANCE
6	3/2/07	Non-profit	Alaska-Siberia Research Ce	Secretary of Defense	DOD	INVITES THE SECDEF TO ATTEND THE RUSSIAN AMERICAN SUM
7	1/12/07	Senate	Alexander, Lamar	Assistant Secretary for Leg	DOD	REQUEST TO GO TO IRAQ AND PERFORM FOR THE TROOPS
8	1/16/07	Senate	Alexander, Lamar	Assistant Secretary for Leg	DOD	REQUESTING PERMISSION TO STAY OVERNIGHT AT MILITARY B
9	2/21/07	Senate	Allard, Wayne	Assistant Secretary for Leg	DOD	MONTGOMERY G.I. BILL
10	1/19/07	House	Andrews, Rob	Assistant Secretary for Leg	DOD	REQUEST A REVIEW OF THE COST/FUNDING OF THE BREATHSC
11	2/8/07	House	Andrews, Rob	Secretary of Defense	DOD	REQUESTS AWARD OF THE PURPLE HEART MEDAL FOR MARINE!
12	1/9/07	House	Andrews, Rob	Secretary of Defense	DOD	REQUESTS WRITTEN VERIFICATION OF DOD CONDUCTING AN I
13	1/23/07	House	Andrews, Rob	Secretary of Defense	DOD	SEEKS TO MARKET PRODUCT WITH DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
14	1/31/07	DoD	Army War College	Secretary of Defense	DOD	INVITE TO ADDRESS THE ARMY WAR COLLEGE CLASS ON 0514K
15	1/31/07	House	Baird, Brian	Secretary of Defense	DOD	REQUESTS CORRECTION OF THE ROLLOVER RATE OF THE M111
16	1/19/07	House	Baker, Richard	Assistant Secretary for Leg	DOD	REQUESTING PAYMENT FORM DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE FOR O
17	2/27/07	Senate	Baucus, Max	Assistant Secretary for Leg	DOD	CIVILIAN ARMY RECRUITERS WERE TERMINATED WITHOUT ANY
18	2/27/07	Senate	Baucus, Max	Assistant Secretary for Leg	DOD	REQUEST FOR COPY OF W-2 FOR 2005
19	2/6/07	Senate	Baucus, Max	Assistant Secretary for Leg	DOD	REQUEST FOR UNEMPLOYMENT NUMEROUS TIME ONLY TO BE D
20	2/8/07	Senate	Baucus, Max	Secretary of Defense	DOD	REQUEST SUPPORT IN INCREASING FUNDING FOR THE IMPACT
21	2/12/07	Senate	Bayh, Evan	Assistant Secretary for Leg	DOD	MEDICAL EXAMINATION AT MILITARY ENTRANCE PROCESSING !
22	1/18/07	Senate	Bayh, Evan	Secretary of Defense	DOD	NEED TO EXPAND OUR STABILIZATION PRESENCE AND INCREA!
23	1/18/07	Senate	Bayh, Evan	Secretary of Defense	DOD	NEED TO EXPAND OUR STABILIZATION PRESENCE AND INCREA!
24	2/7/07	Senate	Bennett, Robert	Assistant Secretary for Leg	DOD	REGARDING INCIDENT AT FORWARD OPERATING BASE FALCON
25	2/22/07	Senate	Bennett, Robert	Assistant Secretary for Leg	DOD	TROPHY ACTIVE PROTECTION SYSTEM
26	1/24/07	Senate	Biden, Joe	Secretary of Defense	DOD	CONGRESSIONAL HEARING REQUEST - SECURING AMERICA'S I
27	2/22/07	Senate	Biden, Joe	Secretary of Defense	DOD	OUTPATIENT CONDITIONS AT WALTER REED ARMY MEDICAL CE

Plugged into Many Eyes

Your visualization will look like this:

1 word 2 word compare

Search: Showing 200 Out of 2907

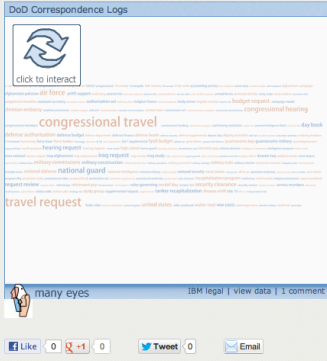
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travel request trials rules violent modification united kingdom **united states** video produced walter reed war costs washington post wheeled military world war york state

And shared it online

Congressional-DoD correspondence visualization

By Bill Allison | Jul 27 2007 | 6:12 p.m.

Why should the Sunlightbabe guys get all the fun? I loaded the subject lines of the correspondence logs referenced immediately below into **Many Eyes**, which our co-conspirator Josh Ruhley used to create our **Earmarks Visualizations**. So what words turn up most frequently in the subject lines of letters members write most frequently about to the Office of the Secretary of Defense? Al Qaeda? Military contracts? National Guard? Body Armor? **See for yourself.**



- Getting your info out there is critical
- Scribd lets you post documents
- Socrata lets you post data

The reason I belabored this

[illegible]

Some other tips



- Save your correspondence
- Contact agency to ask about your request
- Keep a log of contacts w/agency
- Be polite
- Be willing to negotiate
- Don't be afraid to assert your rights
- Some resources...

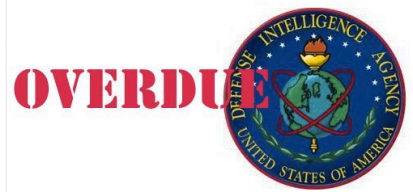
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Sunshine Week: The five least responsive agencies

Army, TSA have requests more than two years overdue



by Jasper Craven on March 11, 2013, noon

While federal agencies are subject to the Freedom of Information Act, which dictates that responsive documents or a denial should be produced within 20 business days, the law and reality rarely match up. Some of MuckRock's earliest requests have been outstanding for more than two years.

MuckRock is an open government tool powered by state and federal Freedom of Information laws, a generous grant from the Sunlight Foundation, and you: Requests are based on your questions, concerns and passions, and you are free to embed, share and write about any of the verified government documents hosted here. Want to learn more? Check out our about page.

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Get in touch

Are you interested in joining the MuckRock closed beta? Just want to learn more? Have feedback, questions or suggestions? E-mail us! We'd love to hear your thoughts.

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Most Viewed Documents

1. Bitcoin and Silk Road
2. silk road anonymous marketplace (DOJ)
3. FBI files on Richard Feynman
4. Silk Road anonymous marketplace (FBI)
5. Hackers On Planet Earth Conferences (FBI)

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The Office of Government Information Services (OGIS) is a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) resource for the public and the government. Congress has charged us with reviewing FOIA policies, procedures and compliance of Federal agencies and to recommend changes to FOIA based on what we see. Our mission also includes resolving FOIA disputes between Federal agencies and requesters.

OGIS is a place where anyone can ask for FOIA assistance. In other words we also serve as the FOIA ombudsman -- answering questions, tracking suggestions and providing information. See something we should know about? Have a suggestion to improve FOIA? [Let us know](#).



The OGIS Blog

The *FOIA Ombudsman: Information and Advice* features posts on timely FOIA topics and events. [Read the blog \(and comment on the posts\) here.](#)

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FOIA Improvement Tip?



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- [OGIS Sunshine Week Event 2013](#)
- [OGIS Report - March 2012](#)

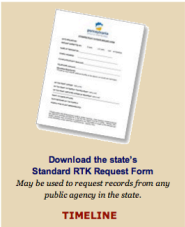
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ABOUT THIS PAGE:
To navigate to specific sections of the law in the text of the law below, click on chapter or section titles in the Table of Contents. Where one section of the law cites another section, those references are also navigable links.

**Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
RIGHT TO KNOW LAW
Act 3 of 2008**

NJfog.org



**NEW JERSEY FOUNDATION
FOR OPEN GOVERNMENT**

New Jersey Foundation for Open Government

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DOCKET INFORMATION ON 260,000 NJ CIVIL COURT FILINGS

New Jersey Foundation for Open Government (NJFOG), as a public service, recently paid the court system \$710 to obtain two custom reports containing docket information on civil cases filed from January 1, 2002 to May 14, 2012.

After obtaining these electronic records, we combined them, removed the duplicates and converted them into a fixed width text file that contains basic docket information on over 260,000 Superior Court Law Division Civil cases. That text file can be downloaded for free [here](#).

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NJ Civil Court Filings

			12/2/2011		
1 CONTRACT-OTHER	SSX	L-00024-11	THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA V V	12/2/2011	6:14
15 PROSECUTIVE WRITS	SSX	L-00024-11	GORMAN V HANNAH TOWNSHIP ET AL	2/24/2011	4:24:00
16 AUTO NEGLIGENCE-TORT	SSX	L-00024-11	CHENG V LEWIS ET AL	12/2/2011	1/13/2012
17 CONTRACT-OTHER	SSX	L-00024-11	NATIONAL COLLEGIATE STUDENT LOAN V	12/2/2011	8:25:00
18 BOOK ACCOUNT	SSX	L-00024-11	AFFINITY FEDERAL CREDIT V WESTSTONE	12/2/2011	5:16:00
19 BOOK ACCOUNT	SSX	L-00024-11	MIDLAND FUNDING LLC V PNEAD FLET	11/22/2011	5:59:00
2 OTHER	SSX	L-00024-11	WPC CONTRACTING LLC V CARRASCA	12/20/2011	12/27/2011
3 CONTRACT-OTHER	SSX	L-00024-11	GMAC INC V BUCCONIA	11/24/2011	11/16/2012
4 TORT-OTHER	SSX	L-00024-11	FREEMAN V WELLS FARGO BANK NA ET	12/1/2011	2/23/2012
5 AUTO NEGLIGENCE-TORT	UNN	L-00240-10	MORAN VS THORPE ET AL	6/24/2010	11/22/2011
6 AUTO NEGLIGENCE-TORT	UNN	L-00404-09	SOLERA VS GONZALEZ ET AL	10/29/2009	4/29/2010
7 DISCRIMINATION	UNN	L-00404-09	ROMANO VS CONSTRUCTION CO INC ET	10/29/2009	6/16/2010
8 AUTO NEGLIGENCE-TORT	UNN	L-00254-10	ROULES VS ABRAMOWITZ ET AL	6/24/2010	8/24/2010
9 AUTO NEGLIGENCE-TORT	UNN	L-00254-10	BUNDEY VS CASTRO ET AL	6/24/2010	11/9/2010
10 DISCRIMINATION	UNN	L-00344-09	B & E ET AL VS ELLERBY EDUCATIO	10/21/2009	5/12/2010
11 PERSONAL INJURY	UNN	L-00404-09	ROMANO VS ROED PLACE ET AL	10/29/2009	2/5/2010
12 PERSONAL INJURY	UNN	L-00404-09	REYES VARGAS VS 407-407 WEST ET	10/29/2009	3/26/2010
13 CONTRACT-OTHER	UNN	L-00240-10	AIR SERV GROUP LLC VS ELIZABETH	6/24/2010	11/12/2010
14 TORT-OTHER	UNN	L-00240-10	EMERYWORTH VS ELIZABETH CITY OF	6/23/2010	7/19/2010
15 AUTO NEGLIGENCE-TORT	UNN	L-00440-10	TORRE VS MANAGARA ET AL	6/22/2010	8/20/2010
16 AUTO NEGLIGENCE-TORT	UNN	L-00442-10	GILLET ET AL VS MENDES ET AL	6/21/2010	11/29/2010
17 COMPLEX COMMERCIAL	UNN	L-00251-10	RIVERA VS LEADERS FINANCIAL CO	6/20/2010	4/26/2011
18 AUTO (COVERAGE)	UNN	L-00255-10	GRANTZ ET AL VS RIDER INSURAN	6/24/2010	8/19/2010
19 COMPLEX COMMERCIAL	UNN	L-00240-10	CHAMER CAPITAL CORP V STONE FOUR	6/9/2009	7/14/2010
20 INSURANCE FRAUD	UNN	L-00404-09	CITIZENS UNITED RECIPROCAL VS EN	7/14/2009	8/16/2010
21 PERSONAL INJURY	UNN	L-00251-10	VILLANUEVA VS SUAREZ ET AL	6/25/2010	11/3/2010
22 ABANDON	UNN	L-00251-10	POSDON FLY LANDSCAPING LLC VS KIR	6/20/2010	8/18/2010

Thank you for having me

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